

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

**Spearfish School District
Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process Report 2003-2004**

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Dates of On Site Visit: November 19-20, 2003

Date of Report: November 28, 2003

This report contains the results of the steering committee's self-assessment and the validation of the self-assessment by the Special Education Programs. The report addresses six principles – General Supervision, Free Appropriate Public Education, Appropriate Evaluation, Procedural Safeguards, Individualized Education Program and Least Restrictive Environment. Each principle is rated based on the following scale:

Promising Practice The district/agency exceeds this requirement through the implementation of innovative, high-quality programming and instructional practices.

Meets Requirements The district/agency consistently meets this requirement.

Needs Improvement The district/agency has met this requirement but has identified areas of weakness that left unaddressed may result in non-compliance.

Out of Compliance The district/agency consistently does not meet this requirement.

Not applicable In a small number of cases, the standard may not be applicable for your district/agency. If an item is not applicable, the steering committee should briefly explain why the item is NA. Example – no private schools within the district boundaries.

Principle 1 – General Supervision

General supervision means the school district's administrative responsibilities to ensure federal and state regulations are implemented and a free appropriate public education is provided for each eligible child with a disability. The specific areas addressed in principle one are child find, referral procedures, children voluntarily enrolled by parents in private schools, students placed by the school district, improving results through performance goals and indicators (assessment, drop out, graduation), professional development, suspension and expulsion rates.

Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary

Data sources used:

- B – District Instructional Staff Information
- C – Suspension and Expulsion Information
- D – Statewide Assessment Information
- E – Enrollment Information
- F – Placement Alternatives
- G – Disabling Conditions
- H – Exiting Information

Suggested District Data Points to Consider:

1. Student progress data
2. Surveys
3. Private school information
4. LEA flow through funds request information
5. Information on home school students
6. Comprehensive plan
7. Comprehensive system of personnel development plan
8. District annual needs assessment
9. TAT: referral vs. non referral information
10. Needs assessment information (such as personnel, facilities, etc)
11. Personnel training
12. Budget information
13. Screening

Data Sources used:

B – District/Agency Instructional Staff Information
C – Suspension and Expulsion Information
D – Statewide Assessment Information
E – Enrollment Information
F – Placement Alternatives
G – Disabling Conditions
H – Exiting Information
Parent Survey, referrals, publications of child find Notices
Comprehensive plan
Yearly child find results
Pre-referral form
Reviews
NESC coop handbook
File reviews
Surveys
School special education expenditures
Private school information
Child count data
SIMS
IEP's
Budget
Table A
Comprehensive plan
Workshops and in-services

Advanced Reading Enhancement Approach/TTL
Continuing education
Employee handbook
Board policies

Promising practice

The steering committee stated relevant school data is utilized to analyze and review progress toward the state performance goals and indicators. In addition to analyzing state and district-standardized tests, data from other formal and informal measures (e.g. DRA, CBM, individual achievement tests, work product, etc.) is reviewed. Each building has a data team that consists of general and special education staff, administration and counselors. Each team has participated in a data retreats designed to assist them in analyzing student performance levels relative to the state's accountability model. The areas assessed focused on math and reading skills. All teams included special education staff.

Meets requirements

The steering committee has identified systems for receiving documented referrals, surveyed groups involved in child find activities and reviewed files. The steering committee stated district policies and procedures are in place to address this issue and has formed collaborative interagency agreements. The steering committee reported the referral process meets the needs of all students, pre-referral teams (including TAT) have been established. The steering committee states students are helped in the classroom before a referral is made through collaborative efforts of the general education staff along with special education, Title I staff and the building counselors. Many times students are helped in the classroom and a referral is not needed.

The steering committee reports no private schools at this time.

The steering committee stated students in out of district placement are afforded the same rights as students in the district. During the 2002-03 school year, there were 6 students placed out of district. During 2003-04 that number has been reduced to 3.

The steering committee stated the district follows and adheres to the state guidelines for reporting of students suspended, expelled, or dropped out as per the reports required by the state regulations. No placements in interim alternative educational settings have occurred.

The steering committee noted the district meets the requirements for certified staff. Three general education teachers have an Authority to Act. Teachers have training to meet the needs of students and their needs. The paraprofessionals are trained and go through an evaluation process. Elementary special education staff have completed the Advanced Reading Enhancement Approach reading training. Middle/High School have F.A.M.E. training. Special education teachers have been trained in TTL. Special education staff is involved in the data retreat process.

The Spearfish District meets the needs of the staff. They encourage their staff to attend workshops and provide training opportunities for paraprofessionals as well.

Validation Results

Promising practice

The monitoring team concluded the promising practices listed by the steering committee meet the standard for identification as a promising practice. In addition to the promising practices noted by the steering committee, the monitoring team identified several promising practices during the onsite visit.

Literacy opportunities are available to students across all grade levels. Early literacy activities including “behind the glass” are available in collaboration with Black Hills State University. The “Bonkers Library” is a collection of books placed in baskets at a specific reading level at both east and west elementary. A second grade teacher introduced the idea and it became a building project raising money to purchase books and then determining the reading level of each book. At middle school and high school the Boys Town Reading Program F.A.M.E. is used for literacy instruction. Literacy instructional opportunities are a primary focus for all students in need of improving their reading.

Alternative curriculum is available for students in 3 alternative school settings. Two options are available on campus and one through Black Hills Special Services Cooperative. These options reduce the number of students suspended or expelled from the district.

The monitoring team sited the mentorship program at the high school as a promising practice. The purpose of this program is to give junior and senior students an opportunity to expand their experience in the career cluster of their choice. School-to-Work provided an opportunity to link education and work on a continuous basis. The active involvement of the workplace in becoming a learning environment will challenge students to higher academic skills and standards and will help them to better identify career of interest to them.

The school psychologist is allowed the flexibility to act as a consultant at all building levels, meets with school counselors and actually provides therapy for students identified as emotionally disturbed. The district has taken a proactive role in the prevention of behaviors that may lead to suspension or expulsion.

Meets requirements

The monitoring team agrees with all areas identified as meets requirements for general supervision as concluded by the steering committee.

Principle 2 – Free Appropriate Public Education

All eligible children with disabilities are entitled to a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. The specific areas addressed in principle two are the provision of FAPE to children residing in group homes, foster homes, or institutions, making FAPE available when a child reaches his/her 3rd birthday and providing FAPE to eligible children with disabilities who have been suspended or expelled from school for more than 10 cumulative days.

Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary

Data sources used:

- District Instructional Staff Information
- C – Suspension and Expulsion Information
- E – Enrollment Information
- F – Placement Alternatives
- K – Early Intervention (Part C) Exit Information
- L – Complaints
- M – Hearings
- N – Monitoring

Suggested District Data Points to Consider:

1. Numbers of children screened
2. Preschool age

3. School-age
4. Age at referral
5. Student progress data
6. Personnel development information
7. Number of referrals that do not result in evaluation
8. District records of release to outside agencies
9. Needs assessment information
10. Personnel training
11. Budget information

Data Sources Used:

State Tables E,F,K, L, M, N
Number of students screened
Preschool age
School age
Budget information
Surveys
Age at referral
Personal training
Comprehensive plan
Personnel development education

Meets requirements

Current practices and past reviews from the state and federal special education monitoring demonstrate the district provides a free appropriate public education for all children with disabilities. The steering committee stated all assurances are available for review. The steering committee reports the district had no suspensions or expulsions of students with disabilities to exceed 10 days in a school year.

Validation Results

Meets requirements

The monitoring team agrees with all areas identified as meeting the requirements for free appropriate public education.

Principle 3 – Appropriate Evaluation

A comprehensive evaluation is conducted by a team of knowledgeable staff, which also includes parental input. A valid and reliable evaluation will result in effective individualized education programs for eligible students. The specific areas addressed in principle three are written notice and consent for evaluation, evaluation procedures and instruments, eligibility determination, reevaluation and continuing eligibility.

Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary

Data sources used:
State tables G, H, I, J,
Teacher file reviews
Surveys
Comprehensive plan
TAT information

IEPs
Parental report forms
Initial referral
Teacher report forms
Permission to evaluate forms
File reviews
Psych. reports
Report cards
Referrals
Progress reports
Comprehensive plan
SIMS

State Data Tables:

G – Disabling conditions
H – Exiting information
I – Placement by age
J – Placement by disabling condition
L – Complaints
M – Hearings
N – Monitoring

Suggested District Data Points to Consider:

1. Teacher file reviews
 - Prior notice
 - Telephone log
 - Evaluation report
2. Exit and re-entry into special education
3. Number of placement committee overrides
4. Surveys
5. General curriculum information
6. Comprehensive plan
7. Initial referral log
8. Needs assessment information
9. Personnel training
10. Budget information
11. List of tests currently used in the district (date of publication)
12. List of out of district testing services used by the district
13. List of languages represented in the district (includes sign language and Braille)
14. List of interpreters/signers used in the district
15. Personnel with designated certification

Meets requirements

Through survey results and file reviews, the steering committee indicated the district is complying with evaluations requirements. Functional evaluations are being completed but have not always been appropriately documented. The information obtained does result in the development of effective IEPs.

The steering committee reports the district follows regulations and requirements set forth by the state office for testing instruments. All evaluations meet the minimum requirement for the state. Policies and procedures, file reviews and parental surveys indicate the IEP team considers all evaluations to determine a category of disability and the district provides documentation of eligibility determination to the parent. The school district utilizes state eligibility testing procedures to ensure students are appropriately evaluated for continuing eligibility.

The steering committee reports the district has identified policies and procedures for proper re-evaluation requirements. All procedural requirements are adhered to in accordance with state and federal laws.

Needs improvement

The steering committee stated survey results and file reviews indicate the district is generally in compliance regarding evaluation procedures. Functional evaluations are being completed but have not always been appropriately documented, nor were they always completed during the “25 day” formal assessment period, warranting a “Needs Improvement” status. 95% of parents surveyed felt included in the evaluation process and felt that they fully understood the results. Review of IEP’s and survey results, and policies and procedures adopted by the district, indicate the district is following the appropriate state regulations and procedures. In some cases however, additional assessment that had not been authorized was completed. Specifically, assessment of Visual-Motor skills was completed and discussed at the IEP, but this type of testing was inadvertently left off the initial authorization.

Validation Results

Meets requirements

The monitoring team agrees with all areas identified as meeting requirements for appropriate evaluation as noted by the steering committee.

Needs improvement

The monitoring team agrees with areas identified by the steering committee as needing improvements. The monitoring team could not validate the process for functional evaluation.

Out of compliance

ARSD 24:05:25:04.04 Evaluation procedures

Through the review of 22 student records, district staff gathers data from classroom teachers and from diagnostic assessment to use as functional information in the evaluation process. Functional assessment was not consistently completed in all areas of concern and was not consistently completed during the 25-day timeline. A written summary of this information, was not included in the evaluation report or in the present levels of performance. As a result, IEP’s contained present levels of academic performance that did not link to the evaluation nor did they reflect how the student’s disability affects their progress in the general curriculum. Annual goals and short-term instructional objectives also did not link to the evaluations conducted.

ARSD 24:05:04.02 Parent participation/input into the evaluation planning process

An opportunity for parent input into the planning of evaluations need to be provided and documented in the student file. District staff telephone the parent but the phone calls are not documented in the student file.

Principle 4 – Procedural Safeguards

Parents of children with disabilities have certain rights available. The school makes parents aware of these rights and makes sure they are understood. The specific areas addressed in principle four are adult student/transfer of rights, content of rights, consent, written notice, confidentiality and access to records, independent educational evaluation (IEE), complaint procedures, and due process hearings.

Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary

Data Sources Used:

State Table L and M
Teacher file reviews
Parental right document
Consent and prior notice forms
Public awareness information
FERPA disclosure
Comprehensive plan
State surrogate document
Surveys
Parental rights
Training
Consent and prior notice forms
Parental rights document
Surveys
SPED handbook
Student files
File reviews
School newsletters

State Data Tables:

L – Complaints
M – Hearings

Suggested District Data Points to Consider:

1. Teacher file reviews
2. Surveys
3. Comprehensive plan
4. Parental rights document
5. Consent and prior notice forms
6. Needs assessment information
7. Public awareness information
8. FERPA disclosure
9. Review of access logs
10. Personnel training
11. Budget information

State Data Tables:

L – Complaints
M – Hearings

Suggested District Data Points to Consider:

12. Teacher file reviews
13. Surveys
14. Comprehensive plan
15. Parental rights document
16. Consent and prior notice forms
17. Needs assessment information
18. Public awareness information

- 19. FERPA disclosure
- 20. Review of access logs
- 21. Personnel training
- 22. Budget information

Promising practice

The steering committee stated the district has not had a complaint filed with the special education programs. The district has not had a request for a due process hearing. This is in large part, the result of positive and open communication between the family and the school staff. All procedures for due process are addressed in the comprehensive plan.

Meets requirements

The steering committee reports 97% of the parents surveyed agreed that they are informed of their parent rights and signed documentation exists in all files.

The steering committee stated the district's comprehensive plan outlines all requirements on the issue of surrogate parents and these requirements have been followed.

Parents have been fully informed in their native language or another mode of communication of all information relevant to the activity for which consent is sought. Consent was received for initial placements/services, extended school year and evaluations in which services were provided in all files reviewed.

The district follows the comprehensive plan for confidentiality and access to records. It is documented that parents are receiving copies of their child's assessment and eligibility reports.

Validation Results

Promising practice

The monitoring team was unable to validate the information stated by the steering committee as a promising practice. The process for complaint and due process hearings are general requirements under the IDEA.

Meets requirements

The monitoring team agrees with the areas identified by the steering committee as meeting requirements for procedural safeguards with the exception of one area. See "needs improvement".

Needs improvement

Each school district is required to provide parents upon request, a list of the types and location of education records collected, maintained, or used by the district. Through staff interviews and file reviews, the team determined a list of types of information and the location of that information were not consistently placed in each student file.

Principle 5 – Individualized Education Program

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a written document for a child with a disability that is developed, reviewed and revised by the IEP team, which includes the parent. The specific areas addressed in principle five are IEP team, IEP content, transition components for secondary IEPs, annual reviews, transition from early intervention program, and IEP related issues.

Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary

Data Sources Used:

Comprehensive plan
File reviews
Student progress data
Personnel training
Budget information
State K and N
Report form
Progress data sheets
Surveys
Complaints
File reviews
Student progress data
Budget information
Personnel training
IEP's
Special education handbook
IEP team

State Data Tables:

K – Early Intervention (Part C) Exit Information
L – Complaints
M – Hearings
N – Monitoring

Suggested District Data Points to Consider:

1. Comprehensive plan
2. Teacher file reviews
3. Student progress data
4. Personnel development information
5. Needs assessment information
6. Personnel training
7. Budget information

Meets requirements

The steering committee noted the district utilizes written notices with the required content to all parents and/or guardians. Students are invited to their IEP. Outside agencies are invited when appropriate, to meetings for students of transition age and any other students in need of services not provided by the school. Parents understand communications.

The steering committee reported the district has procedures and policies in place to ensure IEPs are appropriately developed, timely, implemented correctly and in effect for each eligible student. File reviews and parent surveys support this. The districts' students with disabilities displayed higher

proficiency rates in both reading and math than state averages and met and/or exceeded rates from other large districts on a district-wide basis.

Needs improvement

The steering committee stated the district has policies and procedures in place for the provision of an appropriate IEP team. 98% of files reviewed showed regular education teachers and 95% confirmed the presence of superintendent/designee at all meetings. 100% show IEP's are completed on an annual basis. Parents feel their input is given good consideration.

Out of compliance

The steering committee reports present levels include student's strengths, weaknesses and areas to be addressed. The files reviewed did include some documentation of functional evaluations (57%) and were linked to the present levels of performance. Files did show how the student's disability affected her/his progress in the general curriculum. Parent input was documented in the PLOP in 84% of files reviewed and surveys indicated parents felt they had ample opportunity for input (98%). PLOP was also documented in transition where appropriate. Related services, special factors and necessary modifications were also noted appropriately. However, the frequency, location and duration of the modifications were not always noted.

The steering committee stated the district utilizes written notices with the required content to all parents and/or guardians. Outside agencies are invited as appropriate to meetings for students of transition age and any other students in need of services not provided by the school.

The district has policies and procedures in place for the provision of an appropriate IEP team. 100% of files reviewed showed either attendance (98%) or input from general education teachers. The superintendent or designee was in attendance 95% of the time. Age of majority and graduation requirements were generally addressed appropriately but not always documented appropriately.

Based on file reviews, student IEPs at the high school in the area of transition have been completed appropriately. Some transition activities at the middle school level were absent or at least not documented appropriately.

Validation Results

Meets requirements

The monitoring team agrees with the areas identified by the steering committee as meeting the requirements for IEP.

Needs improvement

The monitoring team agrees with the areas identified by the steering committee as areas needing improvement. Through staff interviews and student file reviews, the monitoring team notes that justification for placement statements are not consistently written using the accept/reject method of placement. The monitoring team noted goals and objectives in need of improvement. Through a review of student files and staff interviews, goals and objectives are not consistently linked to evaluation and present levels of performance.

Out of compliance

The monitoring team was unable to validate the information in this section as out of compliance. Upon the review of files and staff interviews the monitoring team found these areas consistently documented in student files.

Principle 6 – Least Restrictive Environment

After the IEP is developed or reviewed, the IEP team must decide where the IEP services are to be provided. Consideration begins in the general education classroom for school age students. The specific areas addressed in principle six are placement decisions, consent for initial placement, least restrictive environment procedures, preschool children, and LRE related issues.

Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary

Data Sources Used:

State tables E, G, I, J, F, and N
File reviews
Surveys

State Data Tables:

B – Instructional Staff Information
E – Enrollment Information
F – Placement Alternatives
G – Disabling Conditions
I – Placement by Age
J – Placement by Disabling Condition
L – Complaints
M – Hearings
N – Monitoring

Suggested District Data Points to Consider:

1. File reviews
2. Parent, student, general educator surveys
3. General curriculum information
4. Age at placement
5. Needs assessment information
6. Personnel training
7. Budget information

Promising practice

The steering committee reported the school has policies and procedures in place for addressing the least restrictive environment of all students. Students are currently served in the least restrictive environment. The district maintains a very high rate of inclusion (87% = general class with modification). 100 % of files reviewed demonstrate this to be the case. Of special note, is the amount of time those students with the most significant delays/impairment spend in general settings.

Meets requirements

The steering committee stated only those students who have demonstrated a unique need that could not be safely/effectively served within the district are in out-of-district placements. Behavioral intervention plans have been written for students and in-house counseling is available. All placements of students are done on an individual basis by the IEP team. Appropriate materials are also available at every level.

Validation Results

Promising practice

The monitoring team concluded the promising practices listed by the district are general requirements under the IDEA and therefore do not meet the standard for promising practice. Provision of least restrictive environment is a general requirement under the IDEA.

Meeting requirements

The monitoring team agrees with the areas identified by the steering committee as meeting the requirements for least restrictive environment.